

Indicator: Fish Consumption Advice

Milestone

Annually provide comprehensive, accurate and timely advice to the public and sensitive sub-populations for sport fish.

Indicators/Measures

The following will be measured to track this milestone: The number of states issuing comprehensive and timely fish consumption advisories. To achieve this overall measurement of the fish consumption advisory program, the following program components will be individually measured and tracked:

- The number of states that provide information on fish consumption advisories with fishing licences. This means that the fish consumption advice is actually handed out along with every fishing license as opposed to merely posting it or having it available in the office.
- The number of states with Web sites that provide information on fish consumption advisories to the public. This means providing the specific advice for each water body affected on a state government Web site.
- The number of states that use other media forms, such as newspapers, radio or television to disseminate information. This means providing advice to various forms of media and having public service announcements or news stories mention the fish contaminant advisories and their availability.
- The number of states issuing advice tailored to sensitive sub-populations (through any of the above mechanisms). This means providing specific consumption advice to pregnant women, children and immuno-compromised individuals through hospitals, physicians' offices, health clinics and similar locations.

Purpose

This indicator tracks whether or not information on the health risks of consuming contaminated sport fish is being provided to the general public and sensitive sub-populations. The ultimate purpose of the fish consumption advisories is to protect the public from the health risks of eating contaminated fish.

Interpretation

These indicators provide information on how well fish consumption advice is being provided to people across the Region that consume sport fish. Tracking progress toward the goal will focus on maintaining and increasing the ways in which fish consumption advice is provided to the public. Trends that are maintained or demonstrate an increase in available information across a variety of sources will be considered positive.

Endpoint

The endpoint of these indicators will be met when all of the states provide timely, complete and effective fish consumption advisories to the public.

Discussion/Importance

Fish advisories are issued by states and tribes when contaminant levels in fish tissue are deemed to be potentially harmful to human health. Fish advisories may be posted for the general public or solely to protect sensitive sub-populations such as women of child-bearing age or young children. These advisories are of two types: "restricted consumption advisories," which are issued when contaminant levels in fish may pose a health risk if too much fish is consumed, and "no-consumption advisories," which are issued when levels of chemical contamination in fish pose a health risk if consumed. Advisories typically include information such as:

- Species and size of fish under advisory
- Chemical contaminants covered by the advisory
- Location and (in some cases) surface area of the water body under advisory
- Population subject to the advisory
- Local contacts (including names, phone numbers and Web sites)

The purpose of the advisory information is not to discourage anyone from eating fish, but it is intended as a guide to help select and prepare fish that are low in chemical pollutants. Access to this information strengthens our ability to make sound choices about the amount of fish we eat.

The Region 5 states have a long history of determining risk to human health from eating contaminated fish and in issuing fish consumption advisories. As can be seen in Figure 1, the states have been providing comprehensive, accurate and timely advice to the public and sensitive sub-populations for sport fish on an annual basis for several years. The extent of each of these measures varies slightly from state to state. For example, several states provide their advisories in a second language, such as Spanish.

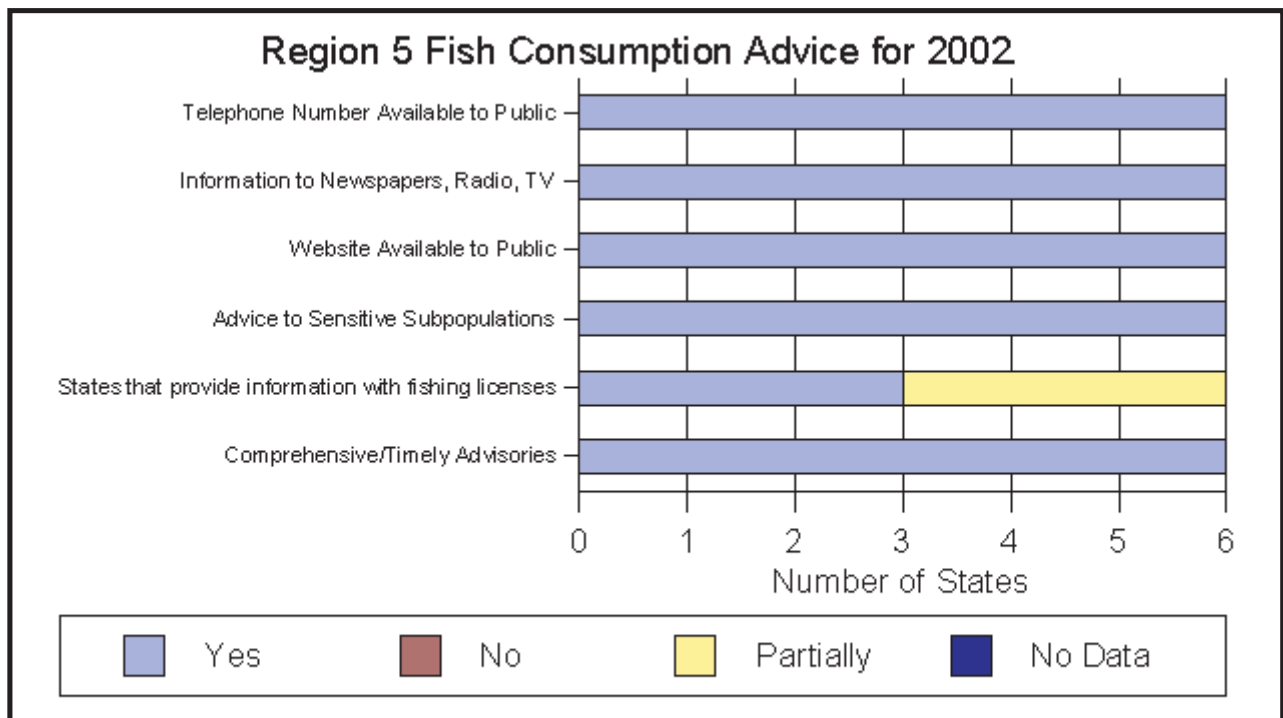
Only three states provide fish advisory information with every fishing license or with the fishing regulations that are distributed with the licenses. The other states typically either post information or have it available where the licenses are sold. In all cases, the information is available where fishing licenses are sold and also in health department offices and clinics, doctors' offices, state parks and other locations.

States continue to study and re-evaluate the effectiveness of advisories and make changes based on these analyses. One change that has occurred as a result of this analysis is that some states no longer routinely provide advisories along with every fishing license that is issued. While this is still one way to reach some consumers (studies have shown that the percent of un-licensed fishermen can be as high as 50percent), these states have decided to focus on more effective ways of advising the general consumer and targeted populations on the consumption of contaminated fish. These states therefore no longer routinely include the advisories as part of the fishing licenses or regulations.

The tribes in Region 5 also provide advice tailored to Native American fish consumers as part of this effort to reach all populations at risk.

Overall, the Region 5 states have been providing comprehensive and timely advice on the consumption of contaminated fish to the public for years. Nevertheless, improvement is possible in all of the indicators. A fairly recent trend is the sharing between states of both targeted and broader fish consumption advice such as including advice on store-bought commercial fish in addition to sport fish. Many consumers of sport fish that modify their eating habits as a result of the sport fish advisories turn to commercially caught fish as an alternative.

Fish Consumption Advice



Data Source

This indicator is based on data obtained from state environmental offices and Web sites, from EPA's annual "National Listing of Fish and Wildlife Advisories" (EPA-823-F-01-010, April 2001), and from the 1999 Proceedings of the American Fisheries Society Forum on Contaminants in Fish, August 31, 2000.

Limitations

These indicators are not direct measurements of information reaching anglers and others consuming sport fish. The measure also does not measure whether such information is being read, understood and acted upon. Such information is much more difficult and costly to obtain as extensive surveys have to be conducted. Four Region 5 states obtain feedback from the target audience by the return of postcards or surveys that are provided as part of the fish advisory information that is provided. Recent studies have found that the advisories are somewhat successful in reaching white male anglers, but are less successful at reaching the more sensitive sub-populations who are at greater risk (Tilden, 1997; Burger and Waishwell, 2001). In a recent study of health advisories for Great Lakes sport fish, only half of the respondents were aware of a health advisory (58 percent of the men were aware and only 38 percent of the women)(Tilden, 1997). In addition, 50 percent of anglers are not licensed and therefore may never receive the advisory (Tilden, 1997).

References

Tilden, J., Hanrahan, L.P., Anderson, H., Palit, C., Olson, J., Kenzie, W.M., and the Great Lakes Sport Fish Consortium. Health Advisories for Consumers of Great Lakes Sport Fish: Is the Message Being Received?. *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 105(12):1360-1365 (1997).

Burger, J. and Waishwell, L. Are We Reaching the Target Audience? Evaluation of a Fish Fact Sheet. *The Science of the Total Environment* 227: 77-86 (2001).

For More Information

There is some variability across state programs in the way fish consumption advice is provided to the public. Judgement was used to characterize a particular state's component of their advisory program for Figure 1 as "Yes," "No" or "Partially" meeting the indicator.

For more information on national fish consumption advisories see: www.epa.gov/OST/fishadvice/

For individual state fish consumption advice contact the following Web sites or phone numbers:

- Illinois: www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/fishadv/fishadvisory03.htm or (217) 782-4977
- Indiana: www.in.gov/isdh/dataandstats/fish/fish_adv_index.htm or (317) 233-7162
- Michigan: www.michigan.gov/ or (800) 648-6942.
- Minnesota: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/fish/index.html or (651) 215-0923
- Ohio: www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/fishadvisory/ or (800) 755-4769
- Wisconsin: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/fish/advisories/ or (608) 267-7498



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